

THE ROLE OF INTELLIGENCE IN FORMING NATIONAL SECURITY  
POLICY WITHIN THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

An integral, and in fact a basic, element in forming national security policy is the latest and best intelligence bearing on the substance of the policy to be determined.

It will be desirable, at the outset, to explain the author's qualifications to write upon the subject-matter of this article; to outline the manner in which national security policy is currently formed within the Executive Branch; and to define the term "intelligence" as used in this article.

Background Experience of the Author.

In 1951 the author served, in the early organization stages of the Psychological Strategy Board, as that Board's Deputy Director. In that capacity, he served as the Board's representative at meetings of the National Security Council's subsidiary body (then named the "Senior Staff"), which was responsible for preparing policy recommendations for consideration by the National Security Council.

In early 1953, the author, as Administrative Assistant to President Eisenhower, was asked by the President to study the organization and functioning of the National Security Council mechanism and to make recommendations to strengthen and vitalize its structure and operating procedures, and to serve as the President's principal assistant with reference to the operations of the Council mechanism. He served as Administrative Assistant (January-March, 1953) and as Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (March, 1953 - April, 1955, and January, 1957 - July, 1958), a total of almost four years. During this period, the author assisted the President at 179 meetings of the National Security Council (48% of all meetings held by the Council in its 11 3/4 years of existence from September, 1947 through July 22, 1958), and presided, as Chairman of the Council's Planning Board (the former "Senior Staff"), at 504 meetings of that

Board. He also was a member, and for a while Vice Chairman, of the NSC Operations Coordinating Board; attended meetings of the Council on Foreign Economic Policy; and was the President's Representative on a small group which considered special operations. Thus, for almost four years he was in continuous touch with procedures for formulating, adopting, and coordinating the execution of national security policy within the Executive Branch through the NSC mechanism.

Current Operating Procedures of NSC Mechanism.

The National Security Act states that the function of the Council is "to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security, so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of Government to cooperate more effectively in matters affecting the national security." The Act also gives to the Council the duty of "assessing and appraising the objectives, commitments, and risks of the United States in relation to our actual and potential military power." The primary statutory function of the Council is to advise the President on integrated national security policy. The role of the Council as a planning body is subservient to its policy function.

The Council (and its subsidiary Planning Board and its subsidiary Operations Coordination Board) is an advisory mechanism to assist the President in coming to policy decisions in the area of national security. The National Security Act is sufficiently flexible so that each President may use this personal mechanism as best suits his convenience. One President may use the Council mechanism in one way; another President in another way. The best use is made of this mechanism when a President uses it in a way which satisfies his personal requirements. It has never been felt necessary to test whether the Congress can Constitutionally require by statute that a President consult with certain persons, or in a certain

way, before coming to a policy decision in the area of national security.

The NSC Planning Board, chaired by the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, is composed of officials of the Departments and Agencies which are represented at the Council Table with reference to a policy matter there under consideration. These officials have the rank of Assistant Secretary or its equivalent, or higher rank. Each is supported by a Departmental or Agency Staff. Each has direct access to his Department or Agency Chief and commands, for the performance of his duties, all the resources of his Department or Agency.

The NSC Operations Coordinating Board, of which the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs is Vice Chairman, is composed of officials of the Departments and Agencies concerned with the policies referred to the Board by the President for assistance in coordination of planning. These officials have the rank of Under Secretary or its equivalent, or higher rank. Each is supported by a small Departmental or Agency Staff.

Each has direct access to his Department or Agency Chief and commands, for the performance of his duties, all the resources of his Department or Agency.

Under President Eisenhower, the normal procedure for operating the policy-making aspects of the NSC mechanism has been: (1) the NSC Planning Board

formulates recommendations as to national security policy and circulates them to

Council members and advisers well in advance of the Council Meeting at which

the same are scheduled to be considered; (2) the Council considers and approves or modifies or rejects these recommendations, and submits to the President such as it approves or modifies; (3) the President approves, modifies, or rejects the Council's recommendations; transmits those policies to which he gives approval to the Departments and Agencies responsible for planning to carry them into effect; and - as a rule where international affairs are concerned - requests the NSC Operations Coordinating Board to assist such Departments and Agencies in

coordinating their efforts with one another in the performance of their duties.

There should always be complete flexibility for every President to determine, as he shall elect, matters of high policy which it is his responsibility to decide. However, because of the

coordinating their respective planning to carry out their responsibilities under the approved policies. Thus, the policy is first determined by the President; second, the Departments and Agencies perform the planning needed to carry out their responsibilities to the President under such policies, being assisted in the coordination of such planning by the NSC Operations Coordinating Board. It is, of course, fundamental that the planning to execute policy responsibilities be carried out by the respective Departments and Agencies which are directly charged by the President with such responsibilities. No person or body should intervene, at a lower level, between the President and the Department head directly responsible to him.

It is the function of the President to determine national security policy in all areas under his executive control and responsibility. Accordingly, national security policy may be formed in any way which the President finds convenient and appropriate. The national security policies so formed, whatever body or individual may submit the recommendations therefor, are the President's policies.

During the period 1953-1958, with which the author is familiar, the great bulk of national security policy determinations were made by the President as a result of the operations of the NSC mechanism described above. Because of this usual method of policy formulation, such policies were commonly, although erroneously, referred to as "NSC policies." But there were occasions when national security policy was determined by the President as a result of Cabinet deliberations (though this was a rare occurrence) or by his executive decision based on conferences with one or more of his principal Department or Agency heads, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or others within whose special competence some particular subject would naturally fall. There should always be complete flexibility for every President to determine, as he shall elect, matters of high policy which it is his responsibility to decide. However, because of the

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utility and convenience of the NSC mechanism, and because the present Chief Executive values the advantages of integrated recommendations and integrated deliberations based thereupon, it has been during his tenure the more or less standard operating procedure to seek to form national security policies through the procedures above outlined.

The Term "Intelligence" Defined.

In this article, the author employs the term "intelligence" to embrace both factual intelligence and intelligence estimates based thereon. In the forming of national security policy, both types of intelligence are of prime importance.

The gathering of factual intelligence is today a matter of enormous scope and hardly-credible complexity. To the unsophisticated, the collection of intelligence raises visions of Mata Hari. There are, indeed, many individuals who work in the field of intelligence, in and out of formal governmental service, exhibiting personal bravery and rare ingenuity and taking risks beyond the ordinary calls of duty. Because all is grist that comes to the intelligence mill, one need not seek to measure the results of the efforts of these individual agents against the results of the world-wide scientific and technological operations employed in modern intelligence gathering.

In the continuing confrontation of the Free Peoples by another power openly dedicated to world domination and to the swallowing of all mankind on this planet into the maw of World Communism, the rapid gathering of germane intelligence as to the operations of other nations in every field of endeavor has put the United States into an electronic business that is world-wide, highly scientific, incredibly complicated, and extremely expensive. One needs to realize the limitless ramifications of current technological procedures, the almost overwhelming raw material that comes flooding in every hour of the day and night to

be sifted, analyzed, codified, and - most urgent of all - to be rapidly and clearly expressed and placed in the hands of the decision-makers. For, in the last analysis, the valid use of intelligence is to build intellectual platforms upon which decisions can be made. It is not gathered to be stored away like a harvest. It must be delivered - in clear, concise form - within the shortest time feasible to focal points for use.

This prompt delivery is essential both to those who conduct our foreign affairs or direct our defensive military mechanisms and to those who frame our decisions of high policy. The sound concept that the national intelligence effort should be centralized is not inconsistent with a demonstrable need that each of the several Departments has its own intelligence arm. The man who may have to dispatch a SAC bomber, an ICBM, a Polaris submarine, a land task-force, has a dual function with regard to intelligence: he has a part in acquiring the latest intelligence for use at central headquarters, all the way up to the President; he also must himself have and use the latest intelligence in carrying out his vital responsibilities.

It is for these reasons that the National Security Act in 1947 created a Central Intelligence Agency and a Director of Central Intelligence. The latter is at one and the same time the chief officer of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Chairman of the United States Intelligence Board, and the Foreign Intelligence Adviser to the President and the National Security Council. Through a series of NSC Intelligence Directives, approved by the President on recommendation of the National Security Council, the President has sought to make more efficient and rapid the gathering and dissemination of intelligence. These Directives put emphasis on the centralization of authority and responsibility in the intelligence field and on making the separate intelligence organizations of the respective Services and of other Departments and Agencies contributory to, and not independent of, such central authority, while still allowing them to meet their specialized needs.

The President has shown a constant awareness of the urgency of perfecting the national intelligence effort. He has given close attention to reports on our national intelligence effort made by: (a) the committee headed by General James A. Doolittle (October, 1954); (b) the Hoover Commission's Task Force on Intelligence Activities headed by General Mark Clark (May, 1955); and (c) the President's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities, now headed by General John E. Hull and formerly chaired by Dr. James R. Killian. Because of his continued awareness, the President formally established the latter Board by Executive Order (February, 1956) and gave to it the continuing mission of reviewing the conduct of our foreign intelligence activities and of reporting thereon periodically to the Chief Executive.

The critical area of intelligence gathering and dissemination, at all levels in operating the many intelligence arms, involves a truly vast annual expenditure. In terms of the national survival, the prompt delivery of correct intelligence to the President, the ultimate decision-maker, is an undebatable necessity.

Beyond the factual intelligence which has been described above, collected and sifted and clearly expressed for understandable use and disseminated daily in rapid fashion, is the requirement of making intelligence estimates based thereon. Such estimates may be addressed to a particular country, area, situation, armament, or function and set forth both the particular facts and the likely future actions predicable thereon, or they may seek to arrange with logical consideration and precision the broadest spectrum of intelligence materials into a considered appraisal of what over-all developments may be in future time.

Both types of intelligence estimates can be of the greatest possible help to the policy makers and planners. The preparation of such estimates requires an expert competence. It also calls for objective thinking by those who have the authority to agree or to differ. Because of the prophetic nature of any estimate,

it is of great consequence that the final text should seek, not compromise, but clarity. In my experience, many of the coordinated national intelligence estimates have clearly and fully set forth the dissenting views (whenever dissents existed) held by competent members of the U.S. Intelligence Board which prepared such estimates.

The Use of Intelligence in Policy Formulation.

The prompt circulation of daily, special, and national estimates to those who make the recommendations and decisions on high policy is an obvious necessity.

The special and national estimates should be reviewed in detail, dissected, argued over, and become familiar material to the NSC Planning Board, which is responsible for recommending policy action in relation to the subject-matter which they cover. And they should be circulated in time to be studied and weighed by the members of the National Security Council, before the subjects to which they relate are to be taken up at the Council level. The NSC Planning Board and the National Security Council should be "inseminated" with their contents, as the author once expressed it to a high official in the British Intelligence.

This "insemination" at the Planning Board level has been a part of its standing operating procedure since 1953, as is more fully discussed below. At the level of the members of the Council, such education is carried on in several ways.

The Council members receive daily, weekly, special, and general intelligence publications, and to be familiar with this material is a part of their function. To make sure that Council members are fully aware of current intelligence, an innovation was introduced at meetings of the National Security Council beginning in 1953. Before then, the oral briefing on current intelligence was given each day to the President alone, in the President's office. Since that



time, however, it has been a part of the Council's established procedure, that the first agenda item at each meeting be a briefing by the Director of Central Intelligence on the latest important intelligence throughout the world, with special focus on those areas which are to be the subject of <sup>the meeting's</sup> /later agenda items.

This briefing is oral, assisted by visual presentations through geographical maps and charts on easels behind the Director's seat. The briefing normally consumes between 15% and 25% of the Council meeting-time, and is frequently interrupted by specific questions from the President and other Council members. These questions often give rise to colloquies and extemporaneous expressions of views which are of consequence to the policy recommendations that are to be discussed.

This direct confrontation of the Council with current and special intelligence, each week, has always seemed to the author an important aid to policy consideration and formulation. Yet, so far as the author is informed, the British Cabinet and the War Cabinet under Sir Winston Churchill carried on their policy deliberations without the benefit of this stimulating and focussing procedure.

In addition to the foregoing routine, the Director of Central Intelligence annually reports to the Council with reference to the problems that have faced the Intelligence Community in the preceding period and the measures and means adopted for dealing with them.

Under the National Security Act, the Central Intelligence Agency is subject to the National Security Council and the Director is the Council's Adviser on Foreign Intelligence; in fact, it is in this advisory capacity that the Director of Central Intelligence attends all meetings of the Council. From time to time, the National Security Council Intelligence Directives, which form the charter for the operations of the Intelligence Community, are reviewed and revised by the President and Council.

These NSC Intelligence Directives (or "nonskids," as they are called) are detailed and often complicated, especially in their relation to the functional gathering and rapid dissemination of intelligence. Often, the revision of such an NSCID may require months of prior study by a special panel of scientists, technologists, and cryptanalysts - persons of the highest intellectual and scientific standing - brought together to advise on methods and procedures. Many of these highly-classified studies, which are necessary for the purposes of the experts in the field, involve most carefully-guarded secrets. Yet it is important for the Council to understand, in general terms, how the vast Intelligence Community of modern days is organized, operates, and is supervised. And the principles growing out of the findings and recommendations of such highly-classified studies are matters for Council and, especially, Presidential action.

In times of particular crisis, the function of intelligence is elevated in importance. One thinks of such historical events as Indo-China in 1954, Quemoy - Matsu - and the Tachens in 1954-1955, and Lebanon in 1958, - to cite merely a few. In the deliberations which led to Presidential policy decisions, the intelligence appraisal of the Director of Central Intelligence, the foreign policy appraisal by the Secretary of State, and the military appraisal by the Joint Chiefs of Staff were indispensable ingredients before the die was cast and the policy set.

The NSC Planning Board necessarily probes deeply into the latest intelligence on each subject coming before it. A Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency is in regular attendance at the Planning Board Table. To the Board's deliberations he brings an informed knowledge of the contents of special and general Intelligence Estimates. He is prepared and qualified to (and does) participate from his point of view on the matters currently under debate at the Planning Board Table. It would be as unthinkable to overlook his views as the

Chairman of the Board, who has the necessary experience to lead the Board.

The members of the Board, which the Under Secretary of State

has been a regular attendance since representatives of Defense,

Treasury, Budget, USIA, AEC, ICA, and the two cognizant Special Assistants to the

President. At the informal Wednesday luncheon meeting which always precedes the

"OCB" meeting, the Director of Central Intelligence has an opportunity to thrash

out problems of a sensitive nature. At the more formal Board meetings which

views of the representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who is also seated at the Table as adviser on military issues.

The Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs seek to coordinate the work of preparing and submitting Intelligence Estimates with the appropriate items to appear on the forward agenda of the NSC Planning Board. To that end, the Planning Board Agenda is tentatively scheduled for a period of 2 or more months ahead, so that the flow of intelligence work may be arranged to meet the policy-makers' demands. Of course, history sometimes takes a hand. In such an event, the scheduled forward agenda may have to be suspended for immediate consideration of a Special Intelligence Estimate that is urgently required. There can be nothing static or cut-and-dried in scheduling ahead the Planning Board's work-load (and consequently the Council's forward agenda); for it is entirely unpredictable how long a time may be consumed in the preparation of particular policy recommendations or what interruptions may be forced by extrinsic happenings. In each and every case, one factor is essential: a foundation of the latest and best intelligence to build upon and the constant rechecking of intelligence material as time marches on to the Council deliberation and the Presidential decision.

Turning for a moment from policy formulation through the NSC Planning Board to coordination of planning to carry out approved policy through the NSC Operations Coordinating Board, we find again the necessary ingredient of current intelligence. At the weekly meetings of the "OCB," over which the Under Secretary of State presides, there are in regular attendance senior representatives of Defense, Treasury, Budget, USIA, AEC, ICA, and the two cognizant Special Assistants to the President. At the informal Wednesday luncheon meeting which always precedes the "OCB" meeting, the Director of Central Intelligence has an opportunity to thrash out problems of a sensitive nature. At the more formal Board meetings which

follow, he is a full participant. The coordination of the planning of the responsible Departments and Agencies to carry out a policy which the President has approved requires a knowledge of up-to-the-minute intelligence quite as much as did the making of the policy so to be carried out.

Annually, the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) prepares an Estimate of the World Situation. This document, sometimes running to 60 or more printed pages, buttressed by tables and special supporting matter, is awaited each year with the greatest interest - and anxiety - by those who comprise the policy-making mechanism. It is an invaluable production. Here are distilled the painstaking efforts of the entire Intelligence Community, working through the USIB, to state as of the year-end the dimensions of the foreign threat to our national security. It is invaluable because it is written with scrupulous care, it is documented, and it sets forth with clear distinction - where differences of opinion occur - the opposing views of the experts who cannot agree with the majority estimate. The author conceives this annual basic estimate to be of great consequence: as a stimulant, as a guide, as a frank expression of differing views on matters which may be of highest consequence. It forms each year the departure point for the recurring review of our basic national security policy.

The first step is to schedule the annual National Estimate for discussion at two or three meetings of the NSC Planning Board. At these meetings, it receives 7 to 10 hours of controversial discussion and search for better understanding. The Estimate's contents are analyzed and dissected so that attention can be focussed upon its most important conclusions. In some years, distinguished Consultants from "outside of Government" are invited to these Planning Board meetings (such men as General Gruenther, John J. McCloy, Arthur W. Burns, Karl R. Bendetsen, Robert R. Bowie, and the like). These Consultants are asked, after study and review of the high points in the Estimate, to discuss them with

the Planning Board at a meeting of several hours' duration.

In such years, these points - together with the Consultants' and Planning Board's reactions to them - have been brought before the National Security Council at several Council meetings wholly devoted to consideration of these matters. Short papers presenting the policy issues and implications involved are prepared by the Planning Board as a basis for Council discussion at these meetings.

The purpose of the procedure just described is not, of course, to try at the Planning Board or Council level to change, revise, or rewrite any part of the Annual Estimate. The purpose is to sharpen understanding of the important aspects of the Estimate and to study and discuss in open meeting policy implications thereof. By this procedure, the Council members become sharply aware of the high points in the Estimate and the differences in view regarding them, and can join in a "give and take" discussion without feeling bound by the more formal presentation of carefully-prepared policy recommendations. One has to remember that almost as important as the ultimate policy decision itself is the intellectual controversy which precedes the decision, the full and frank discussion, the exposure of views which have not become fully formed in departmental exercise, the emergence of novel and interesting ideas at the highest level.

Such a precursor to the Planning Board's annual review of basic national security policy, which takes place each spring, is a cogent illustration of the essential role in the formulation of national security policy that is filled by the Intelligence Community.

Perhaps it is appropriate, at the close, to indicate what in the author's view is the ideal procedure for formulating a national security policy. Let us take as an example, - not the annual review of basic national security policy, which may consume several months, - but a national policy on the

proposed U. S. policy toward Mauritania, the more detailed proposed "policy guidance"

State of Ruritania.

First, the Ruritania item is scheduled far ahead on the Planning Board agenda. Then, the Planning Board at its first of 3, 4, 5, or more sessions on this subject, will have before it a National Intelligence Estimate on Ruritania. It will also have before it a factual and analytical statement, prepared by the responsible Department or Departments or sometimes by an interdepartmental committee, on the military, economic, political, and other germane factors relative to Ruritania. Sometimes, this factual data and analyses based thereon are supplied in separate memoranda, sometimes as a Staff Study. In the preparation of this factual and analytical material on Ruritania are involved the vast resources of the informed Departments and Agencies of government; the brains and experience of the operating personnel who work day after day in the particular area of Ruritania and who have learned the hard way the strengths and limitations that are involved; the very persons who staff the Departments and Agencies that will be called upon to implement the policy on which they are working when and if such policy receives Presidential approval. The Intelligence Estimate and the factual and analytical material are explained, discussed, and chewed over by the Planning Board in one or more meetings. Often, a senior representative of a responsible Department is asked to attend at the Planning Board Table, and be questioned and cross-questioned about the factual subject matter and tentative policy recommendations. The Board seeks to squeeze out of the material all the juice that it contains.

After these proceedings, a draft of policy statement is prepared by the responsible Department or by an interdepartmental or special committee. This draft will consist of the "general considerations" (drawn from the Intelligence Estimate and the factual and analytical material referred to above and upon which the policy recommendations will be based), the "general objectives" of the proposed U. S. policy toward Ruritania, the more detailed proposed "policy guidance"

in the differing areas of U.S. - Ruritania relations, and appendices covering anticipated financial costs of the proposed policy and military and economic expenditures and factual data for past and future years.

At as many Planning Board meetings as are required, this draft statement is discussed, torn apart, and revised. In the intervals between such meetings, revised texts are drafted by the Planning Board Assistants for consideration at the next following meeting. Finally, through this arduous intellectual process, there result either agreement on clarity and accuracy of text, correctness of facts, and validity of policy recommendations or, - as is often the case, - sharp differences of opinion on certain major recommendations or statements. In the latter case, the draft policy statement will set forth clearly and succinctly these opposing views (often in parallel columns).

When the draft policy has been thus shaped, reshaped, corrected, revised, and finally stated, it is circulated to the Council at least ten days before the meeting at which the policy on Ruritania is to be taken up. Thus, sufficient time is provided for the Council members to be briefed on the paper and familiarize themselves with its contents and for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to express their formal military views on the exact text which the Council is to consider (which views are also circulated in writing to Council members before the meeting).

Here, then, is the author's concept of how the integrating procedure of the NSC mechanism should work when it is working at its best. Such a procedure is the desired goal, a goal often approximated in actual performance. The views of all having a legitimate interest in the subject are heard, digested, and put together, or, in the case of disagreement, separately stated. In a good number of cases, the views of experts or knowledgeable people from "outside" of government are sought and worked into the fabric at the Planning Board level. The intelligence estimates, the military views, the political views, the economic

views, the fiscal views, the psychological impact, - all are canvassed and integrated before the President is asked to hear the case argued and to come to his decision.

It is certainly true that human beings are fallible and that the instruments which they create are always susceptible of improvement. The mechanism which I have described, and its operation, can and will be improved as time goes on. But the clear course of this integrative process seems to the author mechanically and operatively sound. And, underlying this clear course, there should always be the firm base of the best and latest intelligence.